اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah 96 Al-Alaq

سُوْرَةُ الْعَلَقِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

اِقْرَاْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِيْ خَلَقَ ۝١

(96-1) Recite [1] in the name of your Lord [2] Who created, [3]

(1) As we have explained in the Introduction, when the Angel said to the Prophet (peace be upon him): Read, the latter replied: I cannot read! This indicates that the Angel had presented these words of the revelation before him in the written form and had asked him to read them. For if the Angel had meant that he should repeat what he recited, he should not have replied, saying: I cannot read!

(2) Read in the name of your Lord: Say Bismillah and read. This shows that the Prophet (peace be upon him) even before the coming down of this revelation regarded and acknowledged Allah alone as his Lord. That is why there was no need to ask who his Lord was, but it was said: Read in the name of your Lord.

(3) Only the word khalaqa (created) has been used absolutely, and the object of creation has not been mentioned. This automatically gives the meaning: Read in the name of the Lord, Who is the Creator, Who created the whole universe and everything in it.

خَلَقَ الْاِنْسٰنَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝٢

(96-2) created man from a clot of congealed blood. (4)

(4) After making mention generally of the creation of the universe, mention has been made of man in particular, saying how Allah made him a perfect man starting his creation from an insignificant and humble state. Alaq is plural of alaqah, which means congealed blood. This is the primary state of the embryo which appears a few days after conception. Then it assumes the form of a lump of flesh, then afterwards it gradually takes human shape. (For details, see (Surah Al-Hajj, Ayat 5 and the corresponding E.Ns 5 to 7).

اِقْرَا وَ رَبُّکَ الْاَکْرَمُ ۙ﴿۳﴾

(96-3) Recite: and your Lord is Most Generous,

الَّذِیْ عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۙ﴿۴﴾

(96-4) Who taught by the pen, (5)

(5) That is, it is a great favor of Allah that starting man's creation from a most insignificant state, He made him possessor of knowledge which is the noblest attribute of creation, and He made him not only possessor of knowledge but also taught him the art of writing by the use of pen, which became the means of propagation, progress, dissemination and preservation of knowledge on a large scale. Had He not given man the knowledge of the art of pen and writing (by inspiration) his intellectual faculty would have stagnated, and it would have had no opportunity to develop, expand and become a means of transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next and make future progress.

عَلَّمَ الْاِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ یَعْلَمْ ؕ﴿۵﴾

(96-5) taught man what he did not know. [6]

[6] That is, man originally was absolutely illiterate. Whatever of knowledge he obtained, he obtained it as a gift from Allah. Whatever doors of knowledge at any stage did Allah will to open for man, they went on opening up before him. This same thing has been expressed in the verse of the Throne (Ayat-ul-Kursi), thus: And the people cannot comprehend anything of His knowledge save what He Himself may please to reveal. (Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 255). Whatever man looks upon as his own scientific discovery was, in fact, unknown to him before. Allah gave him its knowledge whenever He willed without his realizing that Allah by His grace had blessed him with the knowledge of it.

These verses were the very first to be revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), as is stated in the Hadith reported by Aishah. This first experience was so intense and tremendous that the Prophet (peace be upon him) could not bear it any more. Therefore, at that time he was only made aware that the Being Whom he already knew and acknowledged as his Lord and Sustainer was in direct communion with him, had started sending down revelations to him, and had appointed him as His Prophet (peace be upon him). Then after an intermission the opening verses of Surah al-Muddaththir were revealed in which he was told what mission he had to perform after his appointment to Prophethood. (For explanation, see Introduction to Al- Muddaththir).

كَلَّآ اِنَّ الْاِنسَانَ لَيَطْغٰٓى ۝٦

(96-6) Nay, [7] surely man transgresses;

[7] That is, man should never adopt an attitude of ignorance and rebellion against the Bountiful God Who has been so generous to him

اَّ رَّاٰهُ اسْتَغْنٰى ۝٧

(96-7) for he believes himself to be self-sufficient. [8]

(8) That is, when the man has attained wealth, honor and rank and whatever else he desired to attain in the world, he becomes rebellious instead of being grateful and transgresses the boundaries of servitude to Allah.

اِنَّ اِلٰى رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعٰى ؕ﴿۸﴾

(96-8) Surely to your Lord is your return. (9)

(9) That is, whatever he might have attained in the world, which makes him behave arrogantly and rebelliously, in the end he has to return to your Lord. Then he will realize what fate awaits him in consequence of his such attitude and behavior.

اَرَءَيْتَ الَّذِىْ يَنْهٰى ۙ﴿۹﴾

(96-9) Did you see him who forbids

عَبْدًا اِذَا صَلّٰى ؕ﴿۱۰﴾

(96-10) a servant (of Allah) when he prays? (10)

(10) A servant: the Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah himself. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has been mentioned by this epithet at several places in the Quran. For example, Glory be to Him Who transported His servant one night from the Masjid al-Haram to the distant Temple. (Surah Bani Israil, Ayat 1); All praise is for Allah Who has sent down this Book to His servant. (Surah Al- Kahf, Ayat 1); And that when the servant of Allah stood up to pray, the people got ready to assault him. (Surah Al- Jinn, Ayat 19). This shows that it is a special style of love by which Allah makes mention of His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) in His Book. Besides, it also shows that Allah after appointing His Messenger to Prophethood had taught him the method of performing the Prayer. There is no mention of this method anywhere in the Quran, saying: O Prophet, perform the Prayer in this and this way. Hence, this is another proof that the Revelation sent down to the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not only consist of what has been recorded in the Quran, but besides this, other things were also taught to him by revelation, which are not recorded in the Quran.

اَرَءَيۡتَ اِنۡ كَانَ عَلَى الۡهُدٰۤى ۙ﴿۱۱﴾

(96-11) Did you consider: what if he is on the Right Way,

اَوۡ اَمَرَ بِالتَّقۡوٰى ؕ﴿۱۲﴾

(96-12) and enjoins piety?

اَرَءَيۡتَ اِنۡ كَذَّبَ وَ تَوَلّٰى ؕ﴿۱۳﴾

(96-13) Did you consider: what if he gives the lie (to the Truth) and turns away (from it)?

اَلَمۡ يَعۡلَمۡ بِاَنَّ اللّٰهَ يَرٰى ؕ﴿۱۴﴾

(96-14) Does he not know that Allah sees everything? (11)

(11) The audience here apparently is every just man, who is being asked: Have you watched the act of the person who prevents a servant from God’s worship? What do you think: if the servant be rightly guided, or warning the people to fear God and refrain from evil, and this forbidden be denying the truth and turning away from it, what will his act be like? Could this man adopt such an attitude had he known that Allah is watching the man who is exhorting others to piety as well as him who is denying the truth and turning away from it? Allah’s watching the oppressor and his wrongdoing and the oppressed and his misery by itself implies that He will punish the oppressor and redress the grievances of the wronged and downtrodden person.

كَلَّا لَئِنۡ لَّمۡ يَنۡتَهِ ۙ لَنَسۡفَعًۢا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ ۙ﴿۱۵﴾

(96-15) No indeed; (12) if he does not desist, We shall drag him by the forelock;

(12) That is, the person who threatens that he would trample the neck of Muhammad (peace be upon him) down when he performed the Prayer, would never be able to do so.

نَاصِيَةٍ كَٰذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾

(96-16) by the lying forelock steeped in sin. (13)

(13) The forelock here implies the person with the forelock.

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُۥ ﴿١٧﴾

(96-17) So let him summon his helpmates; (14)

(14) As we have explained in the Introduction, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) rebuked Abu Jahl on his foolish behavior, he had retorted: O Muhammad, on what strength do you threaten me? By God, my supporters in this valley far exceed yours in number. At this it is being said: Let him call his band of supporters.

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ ﴿١٨﴾

(96-18) We too shall summon the guards of Hell. (15)

(15) According to the explanation given by Qatadah, the word zabaniyah in the original is used for the police in Arabic idiom, and zaban actually means to push away. The kings too kept armed attendants who would push out the one with whom the king was annoyed and angry. Therefore, what Allah means is: Let him call his supporters; We too shall summon Our Police, i.e. the angels of torment, to deal with him and his supporters.

كَلَّاۡ لَا تُطِعۡهُ وَ اسۡجُدۡ وَ اقۡتَرِبۡ ﴿۱۹﴾

(96-19) No, not at all. Never obey him. But prostrate yourself and become nigh (to your Lord). (16)

(16) Sajdah (prostration) here implies the Prayer, so as to say: O Prophet, continue to perform your Prayer fearlessly as you have been in the past, and seek your Lord's presence through it. In the Sahih of Muslim and other books of Hadith there is a tradition from Abu Huraira to the effect: The servant is nearest to his Lord when he is in the state of prostration, and in Muslim there is also a tradition from Abu Hurairah that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited this verse, he performed a sajdah of recital.